

RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT IS THE KEY TO NEW CARERS' STRATEGY, SAYS MINISTER

A new strategy aimed at providing support for thousands of carers across Northern Ireland was published today.

The Strategy "Caring for Carers: Recognising, valuing and supporting the carers role" has been developed around six key areas of concern, which were identified during a period of consultation with carers. These include the identification of those acting in a caring role, information for carers, support services, the special needs of young carers, training and employment.

Announcing the publication of the strategy, the Minister said: *"It is estimated that there are over 185,000 unpaid carers in Northern Ireland. Their contribution to health and social care cannot be overstated. This Strategy sets out a vision of what needs to be done to provide those carers with the practical support they want and need to allow them to continue caring and, at the same time, to have as much access as possible to the same opportunities that the rest of us enjoy"*.

"People want to live independent lives in their own homes as long as possible and informal caring is absolutely central to that goal. We know that most carers need some help and support to enable them to continue in their caring role. This Strategy sets out to recognize, value and provide practical support for the important contribution that carers make to our society."

Shaun Woodward also said: *"Following the original 'Valuing Carers' consultation in 2002, a great deal of work is already underway but the strategy represents a long-term campaign of action to develop the services necessary to improve the lives of carers. My Department has allocated an additional*

£400,000 specifically for the expansion of flexible and responsive respite services.

Some of the challenges presented by the Strategy cut across a range of statutory and independent sector organizations and we shall be working with all of our partners to secure its long term goals.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Informal or family carers were identified as a priority group under the former Executive’s Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) programme.
2. An inter-departmental working group (PSI Carers Working Group), led by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, was established to take forward carers issues. The working group was set up in November 2002 with representation from the Department of Social Development; Department of Education; Department of Employment and Learning; the Health and Personal Social Services; the voluntary sector and carers themselves.
3. The Department had also previously consulted with a reference group of carers and their representative organisations to find out what they saw as solutions to the difficulties they faced in carrying out their caring role. Their recommendations were published in May 2002 in a document called “Valuing Carers”. The PSI Carers Working Group used the 19 recommendations in “Valuing Carers” as a starting point for developing the Carers Strategy.
4. There will be an additional recurrent investment of £400,000 specifically targeted at the expansion of flexible and responsive respite services for carers.
5. The Strategy is available at <http://www.dhsspsni.go.uk>